

use our gifts in His service.

10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

- 1 Peter 4:10-11 NLT

God's gifts were not given to make us proud. What do you notice about God's role in each of the gifts Peter mentions?

Using what God gives us to benefit the body is part of following God's ways. He has placed us into a body of believers, the church. If we do not do our part, the body will not flourish and neither will we.

Do you know your spiritual gifting? If not, ask those who know you best what they see in you. How are you stewarding that gifting? Is there some way you can contribute that will bring glory to God as the body of Christ flourishes as a whole and loving community where people encounter Jesus?

WRAP-UP

God placed Adam and Eve in a garden and walked with them there. It was the environment we needed to flourish- His presence, His people, and His ways. We still need those elements to flourish. We will grow vibrantly when we spend time in God's presence, being filled with His Spirit, loving God's people through acts of generosity and hospitality, and using our God-given gifts, through His power, and to His glory.

MEMORY VERSE

Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8 NLT

Challenge- In your journey to flourishing this week, pause daily to draw near to God and spend time in His presence drinking in the love He longs to pour out on you.

Tilling the Soil

Flourish Week 1

INTRODUCTION

As you drive along the Central Coast this week you can enjoy the glorious emerald-green hills. Perhaps you've also observed the wildflowers in their super bloom or noticed the citrus trees laden with fruit. God's creation flourishes in springtime. We see what once appeared to be withered and dead now vibrant in all its splendor. God also intended us to flourish. But what does it mean for us to be spiritually vibrant and fully alive? From Genesis to Revelation the Bible reveals the way we were created to flourish; in God's presence, with His people, and in His ways.

Ice Breaker

What have you noticed that is flourishing in your yard or neighborhood this Spring?

Key Passage

7 The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. 8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. 10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. - 1 Peter 4:7-11 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God's Presence

In order to flourish we need to have healthy or vigorous growth in a particularly favorable environment. But what is included in the environment needed for you to flourish as God intended?

The first thing we need to flourish is God's presence. The nearer we are to God, the better we will grow.

7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. 8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"
- Genesis 3:7-9 NLT

From the beginning God intended to dwell with us. God is the Creator, Sustainer, and the Source of life. He placed Adam in the garden that He created and walked with him there. Before sin broke our relationship with God we spent time in His presence, following His ways.

What caused Adam and Eve to hide from God's presence? What are the reasons that we separate ourselves from God's presence?

God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace. - 1 Peter 1:2 NLT

The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. - 1 Peter 4:7 NLT

Peter says that God knew you, chose you and made you holy by His Holy Spirit. Each of these are ways that God draws near to us. In verse 7 Peter encourages the reader to be earnest and disciplined in prayer and aware that our time on this earth is limited. Our prayers are the primary way we can draw near to God and experience His presence.

The two aspect of prayer Peter emphasized were being earnest and disciplined. To be earnest (Greek- *sōphroneō*) is to have self-control and think seriously. *What practical steps can you take to keep your thoughts focused on the presence of God while you pray? Is there someone in your circle of friends who could join you as a prayer partner as a means of regularly committing to the discipline of prayer?*

As you spend more time in God's presence, you will find that your spiritual life is healthier and growing. But don't allow you time with God to become a duty or a chore. Rather let it be a time to drink in the love God has for you creating an environment where you can flourish.

2. God's People

8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. - 1 Peter 4:8-9 NLT

The next component of spiritual vibrancy is your connection with God's people. Peter is reminding us that we are called to love each other just as we have been loved by God. In fact, he refers to it as being the most important thing of all.

38b... This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." - Matthew 22:38b-40 NLT
21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters. - 1 John 4:21 NLT

Loving others is a decision we make, not an emotion we feel. The type of love Peter refers to is agape, or Godly love. It is an unconditional love that lays aside its life for another (John 15:13)

You have an enemy, and it is not the person who opposes or offends you, it is Satan. How can we love others if we are focused on what we perceive (rightly or not) as their sins? What do you think Peter meant by "love covers a multitude of sins"? What is an example you can give of agape love covering a sin in a body of believers?

9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. - 1 Peter 4:9 NLT

A natural expression of our love for others is through generosity. When we open our home and share a meal with those who are lonely or in need we are extending God's love to them. You are offering dignity and respect when you loosen your grip on "my things" and welcome in others to share in your life.
Has there been a time when you were welcomed into someone's life? How did that impact your faith and your spiritual health? Or have you hosted someone in need and found that you were the one who received the blessing? Share some of those experiences in your group.

3. God's Ways

God has shaped and gifted us to be a blessing to others. He calls us to